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Patti Labelle, left, Sarah Dash and Nona Hendryx gave their rhythm'n'blues show at PdA Saturday.

Labelle offer fevered sound, Charlebois' party a sleeper

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

While Labelle was socking it to a wildly-mixed audience at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier Saturday night, singer Robert Charlebois offered his own Valentine — a long-awaited album — at a party at Valentin's club.

At both events, costumes and scenemaking were the order of the evening.

Labelle, of course, are famous for their shining, feathered and alloyed costumes. Staging is the most important ingredient in this comeback for veteran rhythm 'n' blues singer Patti Labelle and cohorts Nona Hendryx and Sarah Dash. Patti tends to appear the most outrageous (like a buzzed-out Phyllis Diller) but that is her schtick, leading to an open acceptance of the trio's fevered sound.

The group stomped and shouted their way through much of Labelle's recent album, Phoenix, saving their great hit, Lady Marmelade ("Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce-soir?"), for the end of a two-hour-plus show, to the delight of a house that included blacks, whites, gays, straights and hippies.

Meanwhile, Charlebois invited family friends and media to a "pajama party" to launch the new disc, Longue Distance — but he was disappointed that few amongst the packed crowd wore night togs. It was a long evening while Charlebois walked about in a dressing gown with hellos for such stars as Gilles Vigneault, Louise Forestier, Carol Laure and others who had contributed to the disc.

Mostly, though, the house punch provided much of the party's zip as invitees waited over three hours for the food — rather pasty catered fare — to arrive.

Francois Guy and his new band performed (Guy albums are produced by Charlebois) and the jukebox played disco hits — but no Charlebois record. The star was subdued, tanned and shorn of his famous locks, but he was back on the local scene again between acting stints in Sergio Leone-produced films.

Not an auspicious press party — but where else in town could you eat heart-shaped hamburgers.

Quebec sidemen

Bo Diddley hammers it home

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Bo Diddley — an original rock 'n' roller who had his first hit disc 20 years ago — flew in from New Mexico at noon Friday for his two shows at Cinema Outremont.

He then turned up at the theatre to rehearse a band of Quebecois musicians picked by the promoters to back him up. The rehearsal lasted little more than fifteen minutes, whereupon daddy Diddley and his rockin' kids performed two non-stop two hour shows that had each audience up on its feet several times.

It was a special night at the Outremont — a rock emporium with a dedicated clientele of francophone rock fans.

"Playing with a guy of that experience, you really learn a lot," said drummer Denis Farmer afterwards. "He's a real driver," said guitarist Robert Stanley. "I hadn't expected that much energy from him."

These two crack local rock musicians (veterans of Contraction, Ville Emard, Toubabou) joined forces with two members of Harmonium (the second-most popular group in the province) to pay their dues to the 46-year-old Diddley, who keeps on playing the archetypal shuffle rhythms that have become ingrained in the rock vocabulary.

"Twenty years ago, I was wearing a pink suit," said Bo with a sly growl. "And today I'm still wearing the same suit!"

He was obviously buoyed by the support of the crowd and his pickup band, and he led the ensemble through some spontaneous and fine loud fusions of the "old" rock 'n' roll and the new rock sound. They worked their way through some scintillating lessons of the back beat, and Diddley's macho-humor rose to the occasion in such songs as I'm a Man; Mona; I Can Do It and Hey Bo Diddley.

Guitarist Stanley sprung forth with his own superbly elastic, stinging roccocco style while Farmer's drumming was as constant as it was indefatigable.

The show had a few draggy spots — the addition of a beer-swigging Capitaine No on harmonica was a no-no throughout — but when Diddley sensed things flagging he'd say "I'm just setting you up for the kill" and lead the band to a new pitch of excitement.

It was a unique evening of rock 'n' roll, afterwhich Bo went for Chinese food, to the hotel with his ladyfriend, and flew back to New Mexico in the morning — two grand richer.

Goodman more 'slide' than 'swing'

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

To say that Benny Goodman is still "The King of Swing" is to lean a bit heavily on what has become an anachronism. The great clarinetist and his eight musicians played at Salle Wilfrid Pelletier last night with a little more "slide" than "swing."

Naturally, at Goodman's advanced age (67), one cannot expect the sharp edge of his vintage performances of the 1930s and 1940s. Instead, Goodman offers afterthoughts of an era that is long gone — and for this his audience was more than satisfied.

The mood was light and low-key throughout and although the bite of classic Goodman was missing, the group displayed a remarkably easygoing sense of syncopation. They played with a "togetherness" one rarely senses from today's ensembles.

Perhaps the real star of the evening was pianist Hank Jones, whose precision and sense of subtle invention accounted for numerous gems of soloing and rhythmic elaboration. His delicate singlenote style brightened the group's sound throughout.

Vibraphonist Peter Appleyard added some fine glimmers of the archetypal Lionel Hampton mode, while guitarist Gene Bertoncini was offered a laid-back, feathery touch.

Drummer Grady Tate and bassist Slam Stewart, two musicians who have played brilliantly in the past, were little more than metronomic last night. On some tunes, Tate sounded as if he were working a disco session.

Trombonist Urbie Green was a treat with spot solos that were characterized by tense spontaneity, while Bobby Hackett on trumpet and Al Klink on saxophone were less inventive.

The atmosphere of this Goodman gig had more of a chamber orchestra feel than a jazz swing.

Lancaster interesting

Visconti film lacks resolution

By DANE LANKEN
of The Gazette

Decadence and lives-without-purpose are the specialty of Italian writer-director Luchino Visconti. In Boccaccio 70, in The Damned, and in Death in Venice he gave us close-ups of people for whom life was either a chore or a bore.

He continues that view in Conservation Piece, his new film, in English at the Cote des Neiges cinema and in its French-language version Violence et passion at the Elysee.

Here we have Burt Lancaster playing an aging Italian art professor, living composed and alone amidst walls full of fine art in an old-fashioned opulent Rome apartment.

Suddenly a frightening pushy, ultra-mod countess (Silvana Mangano) descends upon him and demands to rent the extra apartment upstairs. This opens a can of worms for the quiet professor—as the countess comes with two bratty children, and the lover they all share, played by Helmut Berger.

The professor is intrigued at first—the lover, it turns out, knows his fine art—but then things get heavy—the contact brings out the worst in both parties.

Elvira Cortesa and Burt Lancaster in Conversation Piece, at the Cote des Neiges and in French at the Elysee cinema.

Berger complains that he was involved in the student uprisings ("maybe I was too involved . . .") and now all he cares for is spending money he doesn't have in lowclass gambling parlors and pursuits of the flesh.

The professor gets to think that his life is rather empty, too ("I went to college, went off to war, got married and now . . .").

So far so good, but after a while you start wondering just what point Visconti is trying to make. We all know life can get pretty dreary sometimes, that neither riches nor art treasures nor carnal pleasures can repair it.

But it is difficult to see how Visconti's extremes of personality and character in a picture like this one make either the problem or the solution clearer.

As always in a Visconti film, the quality of the film-making is very high. Scenes are lit like a Rembrandt, and nothing less than Mozart accompanies the action.

Burt Lancaster gives a very interesting performance. Without losing that hesitant manner that has always characterized his acting, he has become a distinguished figure on the screen. This is one of the few movies in which Lancaster has not been a cowboy or a pirate or a marine, and no doubt this is a performance of which he is proud.

Pro Musica's potpourri disservice to our music

Music
By Jacob Siskind

The Pro Musica Society made its now-annual curtsy in the direction of Canadian music yesterday — but on this occasion the knee-bend was barely visible.

The Ensemble Pierre Rolland was invited to present a program called a Retrospective of Canadian Music, and inevitably the result was not unlike the potpourri concerts popular in the 19th century.

There was a little bit of everything and not enough of anything — and the result was a crying bore. Members of the Societe must have had advance knowledge, because the hall was less than half full as the program began. Defections became more obvious as the concert wore on.

The program was presented with the assistance of the Canada Council and I cannot understand how that august body became involved. The whole idea of putting together a program of only Canadian works is surely self-defeating. The Council should encourage the presentation of Canadian music throughout a season, not in one single event which can only end by doing this music a disservice.

The program included pieces by Sir Ernest MacMillan, Jacques Hetu, Claude Champagne, Pierre Mercure, Clermont Pepin, Harry Somers, Rodolphe Mathieu and Jean Papineau-Couture. A strange set of bed-fellows!

If the intent of the program was to prove that there is no such thing as a Canadian style of composing, the point was well made.

A more eclectic collection of imitations of the real thing is almost impossible to imagine.

One could hear echoes of Canteloube, Webern, Fauré, Stravinsky, Hindemith and even Liszt — which is perhaps why the Theatre Maisonneuve kept emptying itself throughout the afternoon.

The fault lies in the idea of such a concert in the first place, and in the choice of program. It just wasn't worth risking life and limb on the slippery streets of Montreal yesterday to have come out for this concert.

I do wish though that subscribers would not send unmonitored children to fill their seats at such concerts. The two monsters seated behind me were obviously old enough to have come to the hall alone but not old enough to know how to behave. They were bored and they let everyone around them know it.

* * *

Meanwhile, on Friday evening at Salle Claude Champagne, Lise Boucher, a winner of the Prix d'Europe in 1958 and a teacher at the Conservatoire de Montreal, gave a solo piano recital for the CBC. She too chose a strangely mixed program.

There was a Rondo by Mozart, a Sonata by Haydn, five virtuoso piano pieces by Liszt, and music by Debussy and Ravel in the second half of the concert.

As a display of finger dexterity, the evening was an acceptable presentation. As a musical performance it was a dead loss.

The pianist played entirely without humor, without emotional involvement, without pleasure, without pain. Long stretches were totally meaningless.

I know that Conservatory teachers live in ivory towers, but I cannot believe that in this day and age a performer exists who has not heard all of these works presented either in public recital or on records.

If one lacks the imagination to do anything original with these scores, one could at least listen to what others have done before. The playing was commendable for its accuracy — but little more.

Violence study called a waste

TORONTO — (CP) — A sociologist at York University has told the royal commission on violence in the communications industry that the study is a waste of money because the commissioners are prejudiced and have already made up their minds on the findings.

Desmond Ellis also said the commission has no business making policy recommendations on the basis of its research.

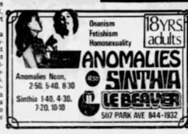
He said there is no proven relationship between violence in the media and violence in society.

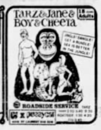
The commission assumes that a person is an empty vessel and if violent content is offered a person will become violent, he added.

Ellis also told the commission that its interim report would be similar in content to its final report, which could have been written by academics.

The interim report included a suggestion that media licensing may be one way to control the presentation of violence.

He said the report was based on errors in method, fact and bias.





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